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SUBJECT: INSIDE MAYOR SARIGUL'S CAMPAIGN

REF: A. 09 ISTANBUL 429  
[¶](#)B. 09 ISTANBUL 151  
[¶](#)C. ISTANBUL 30  
[¶](#)D. 09 ISTANBUL 118

Classified By: Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL SHARON A. WIENER FOR REASO  
NS 1.4(B) AND (D)

[¶](#)1. (C) Summary. A member of the Turkey Change Movement's (TDH) leadership board described TDH's recent rally in Izmir as a "turning point," and explained Sarigul's team is gaining momentum and drawing support from both the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Republican People's Party (CHP). Sarigul is waiting to officially form his political party until after this spring's CHP congress in order to attract disaffected CHP deputies. While some recent polls suggest Sarigul's approval levels are as high as 28 percent, reliable poll data are hard to find given TDH's non-party status and its resulting exclusion from many national polls. Though critics dismiss TDH as non-threatening, increased support from well-known political figures could further raise Sarigul's profile. End Summary.

Izmir Rally Draws Tens of Thousands

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[¶](#)2. (C) Mustafa Sarigul, the popular third-term mayor of Istanbul's cosmopolitan and affluent Sisli district, is continuing his national tour as part of his bid for the prime ministry (Refs A and B). Sarigul held a January 17 rally in Izmir -- a traditional CHP stronghold -- appearing alongside former CHP leader and Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin, who publicly announced his support for Sarigul's TDH. TDH Vice Chairwoman for Foreign Relations Zeynep Dereli told Poloff on January 25 the Izmir rally marked a "turning point" for TDH, and that holding such a successful rally on the CHP's "home court" raised TDH to a new level of national prominence. Dereli claimed that according to Izmir police records, 54,800 people attended the rally (note: Milliyet and Hurriyet newspapers reported lower turnout, between 15,000 and 20,000 people. End Note.). Dereli said the crowd in Izmir seemed even more engaged than crowds at other rallies around the country, and very few people left during the rally despite Sarigul delivering a 90 minute address.

[¶](#)3. (C) Dereli denied recent press reports that Sarigul planned to have Hikmet Cetin lead the TDH while Sarigul remained its prime ministerial candidate. According to Dereli, confusion began following the Izmir rally, during which Sarigul addressed Cetin as "my President" -- referring to Cetin's previous role as CHP President. Sarigul will remain both party leader and prime ministerial candidate, although Dereli said Cetin could be a potential future presidential candidate for TDH.

Forming the Party: Getting the Timing Right

14. (C) Dereli confirmed media speculation that Sarigul has postponed official party formation until after the CHP party congress, slated to be held this spring. This is part of Sarigul's new political strategy, designed to attract discouraged CHP deputies who may be denied seats following the anticipated re-election of Deniz Baykal as CHP leader. Dereli said the CHP is aware of this strategy and has postponed their congress in an attempt to thwart Sarigul's ambitions; she speculated CHP's convention, previously scheduled for March, will now be held in May or June (note: CHP Istanbul Chairman Gursel Tekin told us his party congress will take place in April. End note.). Sarigul now plans to formally form his party a few weeks after the CHP Congress, whenever it is held.

15. (C) Timing of party formation is key: TDH must hold its general congress at least six months before national elections in order to be eligible to run. Following formal party formation, TDH will hold small, local congresses, and then a general congress in Ankara. Dereli said they are taking precautions against the possibility that a snap election could be called: Sarigul has taken over a "shell party," the Rise of the People Party (Halkin Yukselisigi Partisi), which in the event of an election this year will be purged of its current leadership, filled with Sarigul's followers, and transformed formally into the TDH party during an extraordinary party congress. Since that shell party already has met all the legal requirements of a political party, this could be done less than a month ahead of a

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national election. Sarigul believes maintaining TDH as a "movement" for as long as possible underscores his commitment to grassroots mobilization, according to Dereli.

TDH Supporters from Left and Right

16. (SBU) Sarigul is working to distinguish his movement from CHP -- the party he was forced out of after he unsuccessfully challenged Baykal for the leadership position in 2008 -- and is drawing on voters CHP has lost in recent years. Some recent media reports have suggested Alevi and Kurdish voters, for example, would be more likely to vote for Sarigul's party than the CHP (comment: local Alevi contacts, however, have not mentioned Sarigul as a favored alternative. End Comment.). High-profile Sarigul supporters have come from both the left and the right sides of the spectrum. According to the media, some observers project former Democratic Left Party (DSP) Chairman Zeki Sezer, who resigned from the DSP under pressure from the wife of former leader Rahsan Ecevit, will join Sarigul's party as Sezer reportedly has close links to Sarigul. Other left-leaning politicians who have joined Sarigul's team include former Ambassador to the U.S. (and current president of ASAM think tank) Faruk Logoglu, former CHP Justice Minister Mehmet Mogoltay (an Alevi), former Cankaya Mayor Dogan Tasdelen, former CHP deputies Hasan Aydin, Ismail Degerli, Muhamrem Toprak, Zeheyir Amber, Huseyin Ozcan, Mehmet Tomanbay, Onur Kumbaracibasi, Seyfi Dogan, and Bulent Tanla. Former Turkish Prime Minister and President Ismet Inonu's grandson Hayri Inonu, along with former Ankara Mayor Vedat Dalokay's son Hakan, are expected to bring some cachet to the TDH. 18 former DSP ministers have reportedly pledged support (a throwback to Sarigul's days in the DSP), and NGO activist Kazim Sonmez is responsible for organizing the party's Alevi base. On the right, TDH has support from former ANAP Minister Yuksel Yalova, who is a parliamentarian from Aydin and probably knows Sarigul from his work in Istanbul's soccer associations. Former Public Works Ministry Undersecretary Sabri Ozkan Erbakan, the nephew of Necmettin Erbakan, also reportedly has joined TDH.

17. (C) Aside from these names, Dereli said there are "many" parliamentarians in Ankara from both AKP and CHP who are

eager to resign from parliament to join TDH (Comment: this is not entirely plausible, although parliamentary deputies could resign from their parties -- remaining in parliament -- to join Sarigul's party. End Comment.). Sarigul has discouraged these resignations, however, as the appearance that he is disrupting the political process in Ankara might damage his campaign -- Dereli predicted that as the elections near, we will see many MPs resigning to join the movement.

Can He Get the Votes? Depends Who You Ask

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18. (C) Because it is not yet a formal party, Sarigul's movement is generally excluded from national polls gauging voter support for political parties, although some surveys have queried respondents about his political prospects. In a poll by Konsensus polling published on January 18 in Haberturk, 28.4 percent of respondents selected Sarigul as a "party or movement leader" who they viewed favorably, putting Sarigul in the second highest place under Prime Minister Erdogan, who was cited by 40.1 percent of respondents. CHP leader Baykal and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahceli were third and fourth at 18.1 percent and 17.3 percent approval rates, respectively. (Comment: Konsensus, not one of Turkey's well-known polling firms, perhaps could be better described as a "marketing research" company. It is located in Istanbul's Sisli Municipality, Sarigul's home turf. End Comment.) According to Dereli, the lower-end poll results that she has seen put TDH at 8.8 percent (up from 6 percent a few months ago), with upper-end estimates as high as 18 percent. Dereli confidently said there is no question whether TDH would pass the 10 percent parliamentary threshold, and commented that their current goal is to pass the "technical barrier" of 15 to 17 percent of the vote, after which experts suggest that support would snowball.

19. (C) Comment. Although his party's formation date has been moved back at least twice (Refs A and B), Sarigul is continuing his national push for the prime ministry with upcoming appearances in Istanbul, Maltepe, and Bingol. Perceived mistakes by other parties add fuel to the TDH fire and Sarigul -- who generally is regarded as a savvy political operator -- appears to relish his role as a proponent of

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change who can criticize current government policies without having to offer a concrete alternative.

10. (C) Comment continued. While the Izmir rally was designed to mobilize disaffected CHPers, Sarigul backers insist that he is drawing support from a religious, conservative voter base as well, and the TDH platform appears generally in line with AKP policy goals particularly on foreign policy (Refs A and B). Our AKP contacts in Istanbul seem nonplussed (they argue that TDH could never take more than three percent of their votes) and hope that success for Sarigul might translate into divisions within CHP and a more fractured opposition ahead of elections. AKP contacts have also insinuated they have sufficient derogatory information on Sarigul's personal scandals and corruption to do him in should he become a real political threat (Refs A and C). Istanbul CHP contacts also have dismissed Sarigul's movement as non-threatening (and presumably would have access to even more derogatory information on Sarigul -- if it exists -- given his history with CHP). Political commentators here say they have been impressed with the quality of some of the people Sarigul has attracted to his organization's leadership, and with his rapport with voters. Many such compliments seem grudging, however; one typical admirer cast Sarigul ultimately as "a pretender" who would not be able carry these qualities as far as the incumbent Prime Minister had. Continuing declarations of support from CHP deputies who have fallen out with Baykal could further raise the movement's profile among left-leaning voters, but unless Sarigul can mobilize Turkey's conservatives as well his

national influence will remain limited. End Comment.  
WIENER